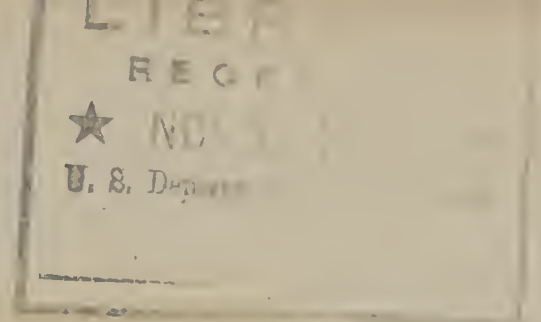


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THE GARDEN CALENDAR

A radio discussion by W. R. Beattie, Bureau of Plant Industry, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, broadcast by a network of 50 associate NBC radio Stations, Thursday, October 25, 1934.

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Hello Folks: Last week in my Garden Calendar talk, I referred to the storage of sweetpotatoes. Now it happens that the sweetpotato is our second largest vegetable crop, and is for the southern part of the country what the white potato (we used to call it Irish potato you know) is to the northern part of the country.

Within the last few years we've learned a great many things about the storage of potatoes. In the case of the sweetpotato, we have found that curing for about 10 days or 2 weeks with stove or other artificial heat at a temperature of about 85 degrees with plenty of ventilation then lowering the temperature to 55 degrees, gives best results. Temperatures below 50 degrees, especially if continued, are very injurious to the sweets, in other words, they should be kept reasonably warm, otherwise rots and diseases of various kinds are pretty sure to destroy them in storage.

Just the other day Leaflet No. 106 of the United States Department of Agriculture came to my desk and the title of this leaflet is "Prevent Storage Rots of Sweetpotatoes". On the cover page of the leaflet there is a picture of a sweetpotato that looks like it had grown a beard and had a slight bald spot on the top of its head. Well anyway that sweetpotato from which the illustration was made was suffering from soft rot - Rhizopus the plant doctors call it - but just ordinary "soft rot" will serve as a name for our purpose. This little leaflet states that the important storage rots of sweetpotatoes are Black rot, Surface rot, charcoal rot, Java black rot, Fusarium rot and Rhizopus soft rot that I have already mentioned. These rots are all produced by fungi. Now it happens that the black rot is the only one of these diseases that attacks perfectly sound unwounded sweetpotatoes in storage. One way of preventing the black rot is to save the seed potatoes very carefully then before you bed them next spring give them a treatment of corrosive sublimate, but I will give you more about that at the time of bedding the potatoes. The point I want to emphasize today for the benefit of you folks who have a nice lot of sweetpotatoes to store, or in storage, is that you cure them then keep them reasonably warm, that is, about 55 degrees and also reasonably dry. It may be necessary to ventilate the sweetpotato storage room at times during the winter but the windows and ventilators should never be opened when the outside temperature is higher than that of the potatoes themselves. If you open the house when the outside temperature is say 65 or 70 degrees you will let in a lot of moisture that will settle on the stored potatoes and that is just the condition that will start the growth of disease spores and cause the potatoes to rot.

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Here's another interesting item about sweetpotatoes. Just recently Mr. H. S. Paine of the Bureau of Chemistry and Soils in the Department of Agriculture has developed a new method of producing high-grade starch from sweetpotatoes. Of course we get most of our starch from corn and white potatoes but the various starches differ in their properties and suitability for different uses. By the new process a starch is made from sweetpotatoes that is especially adapted for the use of the cotton mills of the South for sizing cotton goods. Experiments have been conducted on a large enough scale to prove that there is a big future for sweetpotato starch manufacture.

Now you northern folks are not so interested in sweetpotatoes except possibly you like to buy a bushel now and then for home use, but in case you do purchase the sweets in quantity on the market and take them home, I'd suggest that you do not put them in a cold cellar but store them near the furnace or in some part of the house where they will be kept dry and at a temperature of about 55 or perhaps 60 degrees. If you will handle them in this manner the chances of losing part of them from the attacks of one of the soft rots that I have mentioned will be greatly reduced.

Now just a word for you northern folks about the storage of your white potatoes. As I have stated a number of times in these Garden Calendar talks, white potatoes retain their best quality if kept at a temperature between 50 and 60 degrees. Somehow a lot of us got the idea that we have to keep our white potatoes down near the freezing point if we want them to keep well, but when we keep them at low temperatures some of their starch content changes to sugar and as a result we have a clammy, sweet-tasting potato which is not at all palatable. Our storage investigators have found that by keeping potatoes at a somewhat higher temperature this sugar formation does not take place and the result is a mealy, high quality potato. You folks who have cellars in which the temperature remains about 50 degrees should have no trouble in keeping your potatoes unless it be along toward spring when the potatoes begin to sprout. As a matter of fact, a little sprouting is preferable to keeping the potatoes at a low temperature and the resultant loss of quality.